

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 0295

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PDIP, AS (FAIRBAIRN, SIR DAVID)
SUBJECT: NEW AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR TO THE NETHERLANDS

REF: THE HAGUE 0156

1. FAIRBAIRN, A LONG-TIME MEMBER OF THE AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENT (1949-1975) WAS BORN MARCH 3, 1917 IN SURREY, ENGLAND. HE IS A MEMBER OF ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S MOST DISTINGUISHED POLITICAL FAMILIES. BOTH OF HIS GRANDFATHERS WERE IN THE FIRST FEDERAL PARLIAMENT AND HIS UNCLE, JAMES FAIRBAIRN, WAS MINISTER FOR AIR IN THE PRE-WAR MENZIES GOVERNMENT UNTIL KILLED IN AN AIR CRASH IN 1940. VERY MUCH AN ESTABLISHMENT FIGURE, FAIRBAIRN WAS BORN INTO ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S WEALTHIEST FAMILIES, WAS EDUCATED AT GEELONG GRAMMAR IN VICTORIA, RECEIVED AN M.A. FROM CAMBRIDGE IN 1938, AND RETURNED TO AUSTRALIA IN 1939 TO TAKE OVER A LARGE PASTORAL PROPERTY. FAIRBAIRN SERVED IN THE MILITARY FROM 1939 UNTIL 1945 WHEN HE WAS DISCHARGED FROM THE RAAF WITH THE RANK OF FLIGHT LT. HE WAS AWARDED THE DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS.

2. FAIRBAIRN WAS ELECTED TO PARLIAMENT IN THE MENZIES SWEEP OF 1949. FROM 1962-1972 HE SERVED SUCCESSIVELY AS MINISTER FOR AIR, MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND SCIENCE, AND FINALLY AS MINISTER FOR
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DEFENSE (1971-72). DURING HIS PARLIAMENTARY CAREER HE WAS GENERALLY NON-CONTROVERISAL EXCEPT IN 1969 WHEN HE UNSUCCESSFULLY TRIED TO REPLACE PRIME MINISTER JOHN GORTON. HE LATER REFUSED A MINISTRY UNDER GORTON BEING OUT OF CABINET FROM 1969 UNTIL PRIME MINISTER MCMAHON TOOK OFFICE IN 1971. FAIRBAIRN ALSO HAS HAD A LONG-TERM INTEREST IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS, SERVING AS A MEMBER OF THE

JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS.

3. TIRING OF POLITICAL LIFE AND REPORTEDLY HOPEFUL OF BEING NAMED EITHER HIGH COMMISSIONER TO LONDON OR AMBASSADOR TO THE US, FAIRBAIRN DID NOT SEEK RE-ELECTION IN DECEMBER 1975. HIS APPOINTMENT AS AMBASSADOR TO THE HAUGE HAS RUN INTO OPPOSITION FROM CAREER DFA OFFICERS WHO CRITICIZE HIS APPOINTMENT AS A POLITICAL PAYOFF FOR RELINQUISHING HIS SAFE NEW SOUTH WALES SEAT TO A YOUNGER MAN.

4. FAIRBAIRN IS A TALL, COURTEOUS AND DISTINGUISHED GENTLEMAN, WELL AND FAVORABLY KNOWN TO MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN EMBASSY. HE HAS BEEN RATHER APTLY DESCRIBED AS HAVING QTE A GOOD BUT SLOW MIND. END QTE HE ENJOYS SKIING, TENNIS, AND GOLF, AND IS A LICENCED PILOT.

5. FAIRBAIRN'S WIFE RUTH IS VIVACIOUS, INTELLIGENT, AND TALKATIVE. THEY HAVE THREE GROWN DAUGHTERS. PERCIVAL

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